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In Defense of the League of Nations

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IT is a remarkable fact that during all the progress of civilization and the development of national life, the world has heretofore been organized for war. Every nation in the world has devoted a large share of its revenue and levied a large part of its taxes, not for the purpose of promoting the welfare of the people, not for the purpose of advancing their education, not for the purpose of developing the resources of the country, not for the purpose of improving the standard of living, but for the horrible purpose of making war on other countries, and in many cases seeking their conquest. Now, for the first time in the history of the world a serious effort is being made to do away with the old organization and in its place to establish an organization of the world for peace. For the first time also in the history of the world, the thought of every nation is directed to one issue; the thought of all countries is focused upon one great struggle. In times past one nation has had one great issue that it has busied itself with, and another a different one, but now fourteen nations at least have united on one purpose and have been actively engaged in negotiating with each other in Paris for the purpose of devising a means by which the world hereafter shall be insured international justice and world-wide peace. To me it is a glorious spectacle; to me it seems as though we, born in one age of the world, are to pass into another epoch and die in a better age. It seems to me that a new era has come to the world, just as much as when Christianity came, just as much as when the dark ages were swept away, just as much as when chivalry came into Europe to refine and advance the development of the people. We, who have lived in the past, have lived in an age of war. If this great enterprise now going on in Paris, under the leadership of the United States, succeeds, we are to pass into a new era of the world, which histories will record as a new era—the climax of civilization. It is an inspiring thought, and one which may well absorb the attention of the civilized world.

Probably less progress has been made in the last five hundred

years in the direction of improving government than has been made in almost any of the other activities of the world. The world has advanced less in the devices of a national government, and certainly in the devices of international government. Take for example the advances in surgery, during our own day, that have revolutionized the science. Not long ago, surgical operations were performed without anesthetics. Formerly surgery was almost butchery; now it has become a great science.

The fastest method of transportation was once the horse, but transportation has been developed so that it has now become a lightning-like proceeding. First steam and then electricity, steam boats and railroad trains, automobiles and flying machines—an enormous advance, a perfect revolution in the methods of transportation. In the United States we have seen performed veritable miracles in manufacture. We have seen machines developed which have done the work of a hundred men. We have seen machines installed in factories which have enabled the factory instead of doing the work of a hundred men to do the work of ten thousand men. When I went into the newspaper business type was set by hand. The idea of setting type by machinery seemed like the art of flying—just a foolish figment of the imagination. Now type in newspapers is set by machines. Newspapers in all their departments have been revolutionized. The newspaper, instead of being a concern with an editor and a few writers, circulated among a constituency of a few thousand, now goes out to its hundreds of thousands and in some cases to its millions of subscribers almost before the ink is dry. It is not very long ago since men plowed fields with crooked sticks, but now agriculture is almost all done by machinery, and the United States with over a hundred million people is able not only to raise all its own food, but a large share of the food of the world as well. Science has been made the hand-maiden of agriculture. It is not long ago when the fastest communication was mail by railroad train. Then communication came by the Morse system of telegraphy. Next the telephone came in and now wireless telegraphy and the wireless telephone.

In other words, man seems to have made tremendous advances in all of the activities of life involving individual enterprise, but when it comes to government, up to the time of the outbreak of

this war, nations were almost where they were centuries ago. Things have happened in this late war which would have shamed the savages of a thousand years ago. The question, therefore, arises whether we can now make a great advance in government. We made one great advance in government, when this Republic was founded. It has had a powerful influence all over the world. It has helped very largely to make the whole world democratic. The fight which our forefathers made for independence and for liberty, liberated England as well. The example which we set made the French Republic possible. Everywhere in the world today governments have come practically into the hands of the representatives of the people. Nevertheless, in our own country we have not altogether made government a success. City government in the United States today is almost a scandal. Taxation also is one of our great unsolved problems. The time has come when men may well turn their attention to reforming government.

But the great pending question is a reformation of the relations between governments. It is now proposed to organize the world for peace. I would not claim that this could have been done heretofore at any time in the history of the world. As long as there existed in the world great conquering empires controlled by autocrats the idea of a covenant between the nations to preserve peace was probably a vain hope. The world has been cursed with such empires, but when the war broke out in Europe practically only three of them remained. One was the Russian Empire, another the German Empire, and the third the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They were all controlled by autocrats practically having the power for war or peace. Conquest was their national aspiration. As long as they existed it was almost impossible to make a contract between the nations of the world to preserve peace. But those great empires have gone forever. What was once impossible has become possible and the democracies now controlling the world can just as easily make a covenant with each other to preserve the peace of the world, as people associated in any country can enter into such an arrangement. This can be done and it is done in the great document which has now been perfected in Paris. It is done without surrendering any part of the sovereignty of the United States or of any other nation that enters into it.

The League of Nations is not a government. It has no sovereign powers. It is a contract between sovereign powers in which they agree to do and not to do certain things under given circumstances. They promise each other when they enter into it that if a dispute arises between any members they will submit that dispute to arbitration, or if they do not submit it to arbitration they will submit it to an inquiry of the nine nations, composing the executive council, and during the period of arbitration or during the period of inquiry covering six months, they solemnly agree that they will not go to war and they further agree they will not go to war for at least three months after that time. So, no matter what the result of arbitration is, or what the result of inquiry is, the world is assured a cooling off period of nine months before there can be any possibility of war. That cooling off period will prevent nine tenths of the wars of the world. If the diplomats of Europe could have restrained Germany three days, this last war would not have occurred. If they could have restrained the German war-lords for three days Germany would have come to her senses and not gone into that war. The cooling off period of nine months gives the peace-loving sentiment of the countries opportunity to assert itself and come to the front. Nine-tenths of all the wars of the world have sprung, as this last war did, suddenly into operation. That cooling off period of nine months will practically wipe out nine-tenths of all wars. If, however, a nation violates that promise and goes to war within the nine months against another member, that act is an act of war against every member of the league and involves automatically that every other nation will at once dissolve commercial, financial and social relations with the offending nation and establish a boycott powerful enough to bring any nation to terms. There is not a nation in the world, except the United States, that could withstand a boycott of all the other nations. Germany was brought to time by a boycott of only a few nations, when she was still doing business with the neutral nations that adjoined her. Therefore, the penalty for breach being so severe, it is almost certain that the promise not to go to war for nine months will be kept and will do away with nine-tenths of the wars.

Another cause of war in the past has been the negotiating of secret treaties. The nations which enter this league agree that

they will do away with secret treaties, that hereafter all treaties shall be open. That gives another assurance of peace.

The private manufacture of arms and ammunition for profit is yet another cause of war. That is put under the supervision of the League of Nations and is to be strictly limited. What has caused all the revolutions in South America and Central America? Profiteering in arms in the United States. How have the wars in the Balkans been supported? Because Germany, France and Great Britain and other nations of Europe have permitted their private manufacturers to sell arms and ammunition to those half-developed countries to carry on their wars. So the League of Nations in its organization seeks to prohibit those acts which have produced the wars of the past.

The League of Nations is not a government—it is a contract between governments, and who shall say that this contract, these promises, which these governments make to each other are not to be kept? The day is past when a nation will hold a treaty or a promise to be a scrap of paper. This war was fought to demonstrate that a treaty is not a scrap of paper, but is the solemn word of a nation and must be lived up to. As long as the nations which enter this League of Nations live up to the treaty which they make and the covenants which they sign, there cannot be any war, because the promises are so drawn that if kept they will make war virtually impossible.

Some amendments have been suggested, as was obviously necessary, to clarify the document, but they were really, with one exception, involved in the very terms and discussion of the document when it was drawn. It is a treaty. Therefore, any nation can withdraw from it at any time upon a reasonable notice, but in order to make it specific this amendment was inserted—that the notice should be a two-year notice. It is a covenant between coöperating nations and can only operate when the nations unanimously agree. Therefore, no nation can be out-voted to its own detriment. We have been told that the United States was going into a combine in which it was likely to be out-voted by the other nations and perhaps ruined, but when we realize that all the great decisions of the league, all the great decisions of the executive council, must be by agreement that is unanimous, we see there is no chance for the United States or any other nation to be out-voted. The league

is built upon the theory of continuing good-will and common interest. It is built upon the theory that back of the men who represent the nations in the executive council are the people in all the nations. It is built upon the theory that the world has entered a new stage, and instead of being governed by force, it is going to be governed by public opinion.

Some of the criticisms of the league, in my opinion, have not been in good faith. It is not a partisan question. The great fight for it is led, and necessarily led, by the President of the United States. He has the backing of Congress. Congress, by a vote in both Houses, inserted in the Naval Appropriation Bill of 1917 an instruction to him at a proper time to call the various nations together in conference for the purpose of seeing whether or not it would not be possible to organize the world to provide international justice and peace. Again, it has the sanction of the country because the President, in the midst of the war in January, 1918, called the two Houses together in joint session and submitted to them his message, in which were included his fourteen points, and one of those points was the League of Nations; and the Senate and the House arose to their feet with applause when the President delivered that message, and the newspapers of the country, without regard to party, came forward and sounded their praises in most unqualified language. The great men of the country, the Republicans as well as Democrats, gave it their endorsement, and there was not a voice raised even in the Senate or the House against the League of Nations for eight months. When it went abroad it received the approval of our associate nations, and when Germany asked for an armistice she was told that the fourteen points constituted the frame-work of an armistice and of peace, and she accepted them. Great Britain and France and Italy and Japan gave those fourteen points their endorsement, and one of the fourteen points was the League of Nations. So, while the President of the United States is, as is necessary, leading the fight, it is the fight of America to secure a league of nations—not his personal fight alone. Great Republican leaders like William Howard Taft endorse the League of Nations. Our former President has brushed aside any possible political or partisan gain that he might get by embarrassing his successor. He waived his own preferences for his own particular plan of a league and

courageously endorsed the league that the President of the United States had secured, by joint agreement, with the unanimous consent of fourteen nations. He has helped the President with suggestions, just as any friend of this league has done in this great emergency, and he is wiser in his day and generation than those little partisan members of his party who sought to secure a political issue out of the league. They hunted for some political gain that they could make out of it. They have sought to drag this great issue down into the mire of politics in the hope of getting a political issue out of it. The American people, like the civilized people of high aspirations in the other nations of the world, have made up their minds at least to try this great experiment. They have made up their minds that when the representatives of the greatest nations of the world come together in Paris and unanimously agree to a device to do away with war, they want to give their approval to it. They know that they may have different ideas, but it is this league or none. It is now or never. This is the great opportunity. If this is rejected, it may be ten, thirty, fifty years or longer before another opportunity will come to the world. Let us get it when we can. Let us ratify it as the Federal Constitution was adopted. Thirteen states in convention agreed upon a constitution. Enemies fought it in every one of the states. They wanted to amend it—they wanted to change it. Why? Because it did not suit any certain state. It was a compromise, just as this great document is a compromise, but it was adopted in spite of opposition and became the greatest governmental structure of the world. Of course, they have proceeded to amend it. That was an agreement from which the states could not retire. This is a document from which any nation can retire on two years' notice, and if it is amended so as to dissatisfy any nation, the nation can retire on that account. We go into this as an American idea. We go into this as an American proposal. We go into this as the crowning efforts of the American Republic to better the world, and if it does succeed, it will be to the glory of the American Republic that the world has finally adopted a method of establishing international justice and peace.